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## Peculiarities of Educational Needs of Rural School Teachers

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*This paper reports on a research undertaken to determine attitude of rural and urban schools teachers and school managers to the changes in education and educational needs. Our study identifies that modernization of education makes new demands on teachers' competences, but existing system of teacher training and teacher development courses don't provide necessary results. Network magistracy is claimed as an alternative for rural school teachers, where they could obtain necessary qualifications and take part in scientific and teaching community.*

*Keywords: modernization of education, innovations, attestation, types of rural schools, teacher development, educational process and educational needs.*

**Introduction:** Knowledge is the main resource of further development in the future society. There is increasing awareness of the importance of education modernization in Russia. As an answer to modern challenges, in Russia as in many other countries, content of education, forms, criteria of assessment have been changing. But all these reforms won't be successful if a central figure of education- teacher doesn't change.

Modern system of education demands a new teacher and a new practicing manager, who are competent, having humanitarian orientation, able to solve the task of renewal educational content, able to update methodology, management and practical teaching techniques and skills; able to manage people and quality in education. To change an existing teacher into

a new one, it's important to increase teacher's awareness of the vital necessity of these new changes, it's important how he (she) feels the changes that occur in education, how he (she) feels new challengers and is ready to correspond them.

Rural schools and rural school teachers take a particular place in the system of education in Russia. As a matter of fact, rural teachers remain a main stratum of intellectuals in rural area, they are the source of forming local authorities and municipal government, and they are still keepers and transmitters of national cultural heritage. School is the center of socio-cultural and political life, the main source of information and organization of employment and leisure time for a majority of villages. (Lopatina A., Lukina A., 2008).

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This paper reports on a research undertaken to determine attitude of rural and urban schools teachers and school managers to the changes in education and educational needs. The objective of our study is to identify how modernization of education makes new demands on teachers' competences. The research examined the existing system of teacher training and teacher development courses. To do the study we used qualitative research

**Materials and methods:** Focus groups are a standard tool to assess the readiness of the teacher for their development. The qualitative research was done in three country regions- the Krasnoyarsk territory, the Republic of Buryatia, the Rostov district. More than 300 teachers and school administrators from different types of schools – urban and rural, big and small, conventional and “advanced” were studied. Members of the focus groups were principals, deputy principals, experienced and young teachers, conducting different subjects at school. The research investigated the teacher attitude to different aspects of educational innovations and their needs in professional development and education. The following characteristics were important while analyzing the research results:

1. Presence of divergence between separate groups of participants, between different regions, between school types (rural-urban) and between participants within one group.
2. Correlation of viewpoints with age, post and length of service of respondents.
3. Difference degree of personal opinions shared and supported by other group participants.
4. Detailing of respondent opinions and points of view.

**Results:** Total, all members of research describe the educational reality as highly dynamic. Either teachers or school administrators

talk about a number of changes, which to their opinions have serious influence on educational process. This resulted in a number of changes:

- changes in financial schemes of school
- change to financing per capita,
- changes in the system of teacher certification and payment
- changes in the system of pupil certification
- changes of parent position
- introduction of General State Exam(GSE)
- introduction of new educational standards, profile education
- introduction of socio-government management of schools

The teacher attitude towards these innovations differs greatly, as at the level of teachers themselves, as between different regions and school types.

Changes in financial schemes of school were stormy discussed by either administrators or teachers. This issue aroused a lot of fears in both groups of participants in all three regions. The teachers mainly focused on the system of payment. They didn't discuss the changes in financing of school as an educational establishment. They were worried about their personal financial perspectives. The main fear expressed by the teachers was: « We are anxious we will be paid less». Moreover, teachers' doubts were connected not only with transparency of a new payment system, but with fairness of new existing criteria. Thus, some respondents didn't understand how quantity of pupils, their performance, social status of pupils' families and other parameters would influence their rate of payment.

Change to financing per capita was marked by all administrators (principals and directors of studies) as an ambiguous innovation. Teacher staff downsizing at small schools resulted in poor education for the pupils. When parents took

their children to big, “advanced” schools far from their homes, they increased school material basis. The economical status of small, especially rural schools was becoming worse that raised the question of the very existence of these schools. And if urban school pupils and their parents had real possibilities to choose another school, in rural area there was no such possibility. Consequently, chances to get qualitative education for children from socially and economically poor families and also rural school pupils were worsening. This problem was especially urgent for rural schools in the Krasnoyarsk territory and the Republic of Buryatia

Changes in the system of teacher certification were marked by a great number of interviewees. The study indicated that one of the main criteria of teacher certification was an innovative activity, which from one side demanded mobility, initiative and involvement into scientific educational community and from the other side lowered the role of qualitative education, and sometimes gave rise to innovation for the sake of innovation, but not for improving of education. The other parameter of innovative activity was a possibility of project work. It included a possibility for pupils, teachers and school itself to take part in project work at different levels, and create and implement projects independently. It gave for school an opportunity to position itself at social environment of local community, but such positioning was impossible without actual mastering the project work. This problem was especially important for rural school teachers, for whom it was difficult to join scientific communities. The attitude to the system of teacher certification, based on innovative activity, depended on existence of such experience with teachers. If school administrators or teachers took part in innovative projects, they would evaluate these systems positive. If they didn't take part in any innovative projects, the attitude varied from neutral to negative.

Changes in the system of pupil certification, introduction of General State Exam were marked by all members of focus groups in all regions. According to respondent opinions, changes in the system of pupil certification – introduction of GSE – is one of the most significant changes in educational reality. The interviewees claimed, that introduction of GSE resulted in complete reorganization of educational process. This reorganization, according to respondent opinions, affected even elementary school, where new forms of pupil certification, similar to GSE, were introduced.

Our study identified negative attitude to GSE as a procedure. This negative attitude can be connected with the following points. Firstly, GSE is an outwardly controlled procedure, compulsory for everybody and assessing not only pupils but also a teacher. This assessment is maximum alienated from pedagogical process and teachers, and naturally such situations didn't satisfy teachers. This attitude can't be changed with the help of some efforts; it can be overcome in time. Secondly, many teachers pointed out poor quality of some GSE tests. They pointed out incorrect questions, ambiguous statements. Thirdly, there was high level of neurosis of all participants of educational process (children, teachers, parents), big physiological and psychological pressure. As a matter of fact during GSE a pupil is without any food and toilet for 5 or 6 hours. This form of exam can be considered as violation of children physiological rights. Fourthly – all respondents acknowledged there was a lack of coincidence with declared educational objectives – humanization of educational process, competence approach, implementation of individual approach to personal development etc. Fifthly – almost all teachers agreed that there was a lack of correspondence between recommended by Ministry of Education textbooks to GSE demands. Moreover, it turned out too late, when using other textbooks was

impossible. Especially it was true with arts, where there were different points of view to many test questions.

These objections revealed an expert attitude in some groups of teachers. This attitude demonstrated in its turn, a high level of involvement in teaching. From viewpoint of our respondents, only the existence or absence of these competencies, and the fact whether they were implemented in the educational reality was important.

The teachers confirmed that instead of systematic subject studying they had to coach for exams; moreover a greater part of pupils had to resort to the help of coacher to pass the exams successfully. As it was impossible to find coaches in rural areas, so rural pupils were certainly in a worse educational situation than urban ones.

There was one more common remark: the existing methods of teaching were not suitable for GES preparation, so teachers had to find and create them their selves. Pedagogical high schools don't provide graduating students with any testing methods and techniques that can be suitable for a new assessment system.

The dramatic difference in attitude to GES was between urban and rural school teachers. The majority of urban school teachers, having negative attitude didn't suggest any constructive plan, whereas rural school teachers perceived GES implementation as a fact and sought (and found) ways how to solve these new problems. Some rural school created and used programs of psychological training for passing GES. Urban school teachers confirmed more often, that it was impossible to prepare for passing CES without a coach and took it for granted.

Positive attitude to GES was connected with a fact that it was a universal measurer, affording to assess objectively the quality of any educational institutions and decline all responsibility from teachers. Teachers from the Republic of Buryatia

also highlighted that GES taught pupil to express and persist in their opinion, gave pupils opportunity to enter high schools irrespectively of their residence. The majority of respondents regarded educational information technologies as a result of education modernization, and actually all of them evaluated it positive. The teachers and school administrators of the Rostov district and all rural schools of all regions particularly highlighted this innovation. At the same time the respondents pointed out the difficulties of this process: the necessity of a new job of engineer to service the equipment, and a teacher needed more time to prepare presentations. Also, older and more experienced teachers had psychological difficulties to cope with new professional demands.

All respondents from all regions observed new and variety of educational programs. But some regional differences were pointed out. Almost all teachers expressed negative attitude to the teaching hours shortage of the basic subjects of school curricula (Russian, Physics, Chemistry etc.).The teachers from the Krasnoyarsk territory highlighted it as a negative factor making difficult to study these subjects properly. The teachers from the Rostov district regarded it instrumentally; they were trying to solve the problems via changing teaching technologies and transferring some learning material to self-studying. At the same time our research revealed that the teachers from the Rostov district were less involved in such educational paradigms as developing education, project education etc. The teachers from the Republic of Buryatia reported that a great number of textbooks and programs made difficult to continue studying when pupils change schools. To their opinion, the standard and single program gave real opportunity to compare different school pupils' performance. They also claimed that educational program

diversity didn't lead to succession of elementary, junior and senior schools.

The changes to profile education were more often marked by teachers and administrators of the Krasnoyarsk territory than other regions. Their estimation was more positive than negative. The change to profile education helped pupils study what they really need in future, prepare better for high school. Simultaneously, the difficulty of choice was marked and this choice could be non-renewable.

Accordingly, possibilities of profile school were assessed with some skepticism and uncertainty. The respondents pointed out that profile education demanded from teachers more thorough knowledge on the subject. At the same time, at rural schools, having in most cases only one parallel, it was impossible to organize profile education because of pedagogical resource limitations. Thus, all positive sides of this innovation did not exist for greater part of pupils.

The majority of school teachers (mainly from the Rostov district) approved new educational standards with implementation of upbringing function of school as a basic one. It could help to bring up a new generation of young people worthy of glory of great Russia. But at the same time they remarked that it was contrary to the existing system of pupils, teachers and schools evaluation. Simultaneously, the main fear expressed by the teachers was that new educational standards implementation could lead to class work increase in elementary schools. In the light of this, a new problem appeared: some teachers of foreign languages and IT were not ready to work with elementary school pupils.

Changes of parent position were the main and hardly the only changes influencing school, fixed by all respondents regarding for outer public groups. The changes were perfectly structured and highlighted by teachers and administrators.

In particular, the respondents described the following components: parents' consumer attitude to school; unwillingness of some parents to concern their children, disrespect of school and school teachers, which was transmitted by parents to their children. In some cases parents' consumer attitude to school was connected with school commercialization. But the respondents had a negative attitude to school commercialization rather than parents' possibility to 'order' necessary education for their children. The respondents doubted that parents were competent enough to state the level of school subjects' necessity. This opinion was constantly confirmed while teachers-parents communication. As for unwillingness of some parents to concern their children, it also got negative marks because teachers and school administrators expected parents at least not to block teachers' activity. At present, the interaction between teachers and school administrators from one side, and parents from the other side was described rather as opposition than cooperation and coordination of common efforts. From the teachers' view point this situation was unacceptable. They expected parents to assist, and moreover they formulated their direct demands, connected with solving such conflicts. Disrespect of school and school teachers, formed by mass media and transmitted by parents to their children, also got negative marks. All teachers and school administrators described this situation as a social « disease». It was interesting that they blame for it not parents but society itself. The teachers were worried that their job « had lost respect in society». Also the teachers were worried about unsocial families.

All respondents reported essential changes in school children themselves: worsening of mental and somatic health, system of value orientations, interests, level of information. These changes were more often revealed by teachers and administrators from the Krasnoyarsk

territory and the Republic of Buryatia and also by representatives of rural school. The respondents identified changes in value system of children, worsening of children health, a lot of cases of attention, memory and other mental processes breaks.

Further efforts were needed to cope with children, having different learning abilities, children that were often ill and miss classes. From the other side, some efforts are needed to be as a coach or a tutor to support individual educational programs of children with great abilities.

The respondents were worried about school commercialization. The main fear expressed by the teachers was: « We are anxious school will be left to the mercy of fate ». However, this change didn't lead to the necessity in economics knowledge and management competencies, but only raised consumer attitude. All that allowed us to speak about competence-based need, which we could emphasize as a socially responsible one.

**Discussion:** To determine the list of competences, which teacher and school administrators need to modernize education, we used the following sources:

1. Description of normative teacher competencies, collected from the analysis of existing standards and special literature.
2. Analysis of the respondent answers about new educational objectives and professional difficulties to help teachers to solve new challenges.
3. Direct statements of participants during focus groups.

In line with our research, we highlighted G. Shchedrovitsky idea, who pointed out the following positions in educational process:

- Engineer-methodologist constructing methods of teaching;
- Engineer-methodologist developing educational programs;

- Teacher-planner designing future society man project.

Thus, we can formulate either demands to a modern teacher or methodological, technological, planning competences.

A .Markova pointed out 10 groups of pedagogical competences:

1. Competence to see a problem in pedagogical situation and formulate it as a pedagogical task;
2. Competence to cope with the content of academic material;
3. Competence to use psychological-pedagogical knowledge;
4. Competence to create psychological safety in communication and realization of inner potential of a communicative partner ;
5. Communicative competence;
6. Keeping professional pedagogical position in different situations;
7. Ability to realize own pedagogical and professional prospects;
8. Competence in expert-evaluating sphere;
9. Competence in expert-evaluating sphere of upbringing;
10. Competence to evaluate own work in general.

The data collected from the focus groups, analysis of existing changes in educational reality, demands and challenges of the modern world let us determine the following groups of teacher competences :

1. Clear pedagogical position, reflection
2. Thorough knowledge of academic subjects, obtaining knowledge in related subjects
3. Ability to cope with the context of academic material (technological, methodical and instrumental competences)

4. Psychological competencies, individual approach to a pupil, communicative skills, tolerance in a broad sense.
5. Auto competencies: ability to realize professional prospects, competencies connected with analysis of own experience, regulation of psychological and emotional states.
6. Competencies, giving opportunities to cooperate (rich in content) with other teachers, specialists, parents etc.
7. Competencies, connected with social project management
8. Social and professional mobility, readiness to constant professional development, mastering new technologies and contents, new modern educational informational technologies, technologies of distant education, etc.

The focus groups confirmed a high role of academic director in organizing academic process at school. The essential difference between principal and academic director duties was fixed. An academic director was expected to:

- to organize educational process at school
- to obtain all teacher competencies, but at a higher level
- to help young (and not only young) teachers with teaching methods, organizing system of professional development
- to inform about new teaching methods and techniques, new professional literature.
- to organize methodological work at school
- to perform controlling functions
- to be a source of information for higher organizations

It can be claimed that functions of academic directors have not changed for the last time,

but all respondents agreed that the situation of its realization had changed. For example, organizing educational process at senior school was a coordination of individual educational schoolchildren programs that was break with class-lesson system. So academic directors and class teachers were expected to have other activities and consequently, other competencies to solve this task.

A more intensive examination of model image of a school principal, based on teachers' opinions, revealed three groups of qualities.

*Personal qualities:* mobile, energetic, loyal, demanding, tactful, honest, fair. *Managerial qualities:* to make a good team, to be a team-player, to access a potential of his (her) employees, to set up clear tasks, to manage finance, to give staff advice and support, to motivate staff.

*Moral psychological qualities:* ability to protect colleagues and children, ability to solve conflicts, talent "to lead the teachers", charisma, ability to set up a single team and good cooperation between school, the public and local community.

Of course, qualification, obtained during studying at high school was not a base for mastering these competencies and high schools themselves didn't set these tasks. Furthermore, the results of this study shows that the main source of mastering professional competencies of a modern teacher is a constant and continuous teacher development.

The research draws our attention to the fact that only personal interest and desire to improve qualification, targeting the results, realizing professional deficits and educational demands are the basis of future development for all categories of school teachers. In order to establish optimal ways of teacher development it is important to use project working at inter- and in- school creative teams (was marked by the respondents from the Krasnoyarsk territory), to deliver open classes of young teachers with lesson analysis

(was marked by all respondents in all regions), to hold learning practical seminars at municipal level. Young teachers in all regions highlighted effectiveness of in- school system of teacher development.

Our study demonstrates the significance of “School of young leaders” and in- school methodological associations for teachers. Also, open lessons, delivered by experienced teachers were highly appreciated, because this form of professional development makes either “observers” or a teacher, who prepare an open lesson to do their best: “I have to revise piles of literature”.

**Conclusion:** Summarizing all opinions about forms of teacher development we can make a conclusion that all respondents acknowledge high effectiveness of practical-orientated in-school forms for teachers. But these forms of teacher development are not provided with official certifications. Discussing existing Regional institutes of teacher development (RITD) almost all respondents agreed that during last time there were positive changes; a new opportunity appeared **to** order any course according to the exact school demands. At the same time, most of

the respondents reported that outdated materials were used at RITD, it didn’t reflect modern demands and solving modern educational problems, new forms of pupils’ assessments (GSE) were not discussed, and new computer technologies were not studied. To solve the problem of teacher development it’s possible to set up a network magistracy programs for teachers. (Report on the first stage of Federal State Program for 2006-2010 (task 3 «Educational management improving», event 20 «Design and realization of efforts to form managers for educational system to meet modern demands» (Krasnoyarsk: SFU, 2008).

Network magistracy is claimed as an alternative for rural school teachers, where they could obtain necessary qualifications and take part in scientific and teaching community. Further efforts are needed to support teacher development – to use either Russian experience in teacher training programs or foreign successful practice of teacher development; especially Scandinavian and East-Asian countries. The results of this study complement existing studies and could be integrated into the development of new standards.

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## **Особенности образовательных потребностей педагогов сельских школ**

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*Статья посвящена исследованию отношения учителей и руководителей сельских школ к модернизации образования и их образовательных потребностей. Исследование показывает, что модернизация образования предъявляет новые требования к профессиональным компетентностям учителя, но существующая система подготовки и повышения квалификации педагогов не удовлетворяет потребностей. Сетевая магистратура может стать альтернативой для педагогов сельских школ, они смогут развивать навыки профессиональной компетентности и участвовать в научных и педагогических сообществах.*

*Ключевые слова: модернизация образования, инновации, аттестация, типы сельских школ, развитие профессиональных компетентностей учителя, образовательный процесс и образовательные потребности.*

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